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MAYLAND, MASS. 01778

President:

Speech of the Rev. John Burt Wight  
at the library celebration Aug. 26, 1851

I might well excuse myself from saying anything on the present occasion in view of the distinguished gentlemen from other towns who have favored us with their presence to the eloquent and welcome voices of whom I trust it will be our privilege and gratification to listen. But I am so deeply impressed with the importance and spirit of the occasion that I cannot refrain from saying a few words.

We are assembled, Mr. President, to welcome to our town with manifestations of respect and gratitude, an eminent scholar and distinguished head of a flourishing university in an adjacent state to whose wise and liberal munificence we are indebted for the foundation of a large and valuable Public Library destined we doubt not to be maintained, increased, and perpetuated for our benefit and the benefit of our children and our children's children through many generations. Shall I not be justified in saying, I will venture to say it, that however high the public reputation which has been so well earned, and so extensively accorded to our honored guest, it will ever be a great additional honor that he has devised the plan, and effected the formation, and established the example of this institution.

Much has been done and is still doing for the promotion of education in this commonwealth in the extensive and excellent provisions which have been made for the instruction of the children and youth in the common schools and the academies and colleges, and how much we are indebted to the liberal benefactions, the judicious measures, and the able and indefatigable exertions of some of our wisest and best men in their behalf for the superior intelligence and better information of our citizens and for our remarkable prosperity at home and high respectability abroad. Now, in addition to these essential and fundamental institutions of early cultures in the establishment and maintenance of public \_\_\_\_\_, we may make ample and \_\_\_\_\_ (? effective) provision for the





increasing information and progressive education of the whole people throughout their whole lives. And what treasures of useful knowledge and mental improvement and innocent gratification, what aids in business of talent, in physical regiment, and in social, intellectual, manual, and religious advancement will then be brought and received not merely to a few opulent individuals or to a very limited number of proprietors of social libraries but to every family and person in the several communities in which they exist. These are some of the highest advantages in society and wherever such libraries are formed these advantages will be accessible to every family and every person to a much greater extent than they are now with but very few exceptions possessed by those who are in the most affluent circumstances.

Nor are the advantages and benefits of such libraries to be confined to this and a few other favored towns. At the last session of the legislature a law was passed with great unanimity authorizing any city or town to establish and maintain a public library for the use of its inhabitants and will not the establishment of such a library in one town inevitably lead to the establishment of a similar one in other towns, and the establishment of a a similar one in these towns to the establishment of a similar one in many more. And may not the legislature at any session by a small grant in aid of the annual increase of such libraries wherever they exist, a grant much less than that which is now annually made in aid of the common schools ensure the formation, increase, and perpetuation of such libraries in all the cities and towns of the Commonwealth within a very few years.

Nor is this all. When the bill in this subject was brought into the legislature copies of it were sent out not only to distinguished friends of education in various parts of the commonwealth but also to all the Boards of Education in the Eastern, Middle, Western, and some Southern states, so that the idea that sufficient provision





should be made not only for ~~the~~ early instruction of children and youth, but also for the increasing information and progressive culture of the whole people through life has been very extensively disseminated. It cannot be doubted that this idea will find a place and take root in many minds into which it had not previously entered. And its great importance and the increasing wants of an age in which knowledge is more and more required and asked for will insure its realization, at first perhaps slowly but afterwards more rapidly until its fruits shall fill the whole land.

Permit me, now, Mr. President, in honor of our distinguished guest, and as a first exponent of the nature and importance of the library for the use and benefit of all our inhabitants which in consequence of his liberal donation for this purpose has been here \_\_\_\_\_ (? established) permit me now, I say, to offer the following sentiment -

That the most extensive and greatest advantages and benefits of popular education may be secured to a state, it is requisite that when (or which?) a suitable provision is made in common schools for the good education of the children and youth, a suitable provision <sup>also</sup> should be made in the establishment, increase and perpetuation of public libraries in every city and town for the continual instruction and progressive education of the whole people, in the subsequent and much more capable and valuable periods of life.

Speech of the Rev. John West at Library Convention  
And. 1821

